

MARVEL

13

LGY#439

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DOCTOR STRANGE



DOCTOR STRANGE

PREVIOUSLY...

As Sorcerer Supreme, Stephen Strange acts as Earth's mystic defender and consultant to its heroes in all things magic. Operating from his Sanctum Sanctorum in Greenwich Village, he and his wife, Clea, have ended the threat of his raging doppelganger, General Strange.

But magic is never quiet for long, as Doctor Strange finds himself face-to-face with a most unusual incarnation of the occult...

“COBOLORUM PT. 1”

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DOCTOR STRANGE CREATED BY STAN LEE & STEVE DITKO



HMM.

I TAKE
IT THAT THIS
IS NOT WHAT THIS
STREET **NORMALLY**
LOOKS LIKE?

NO,
CLEA, IT IS
NOT.

THEN
WHAT **IS**
IT?

**UPPER WEST SIDE,
NEW YORK CITY.**

I FEAR THAT IT IS
COBOLORUM.

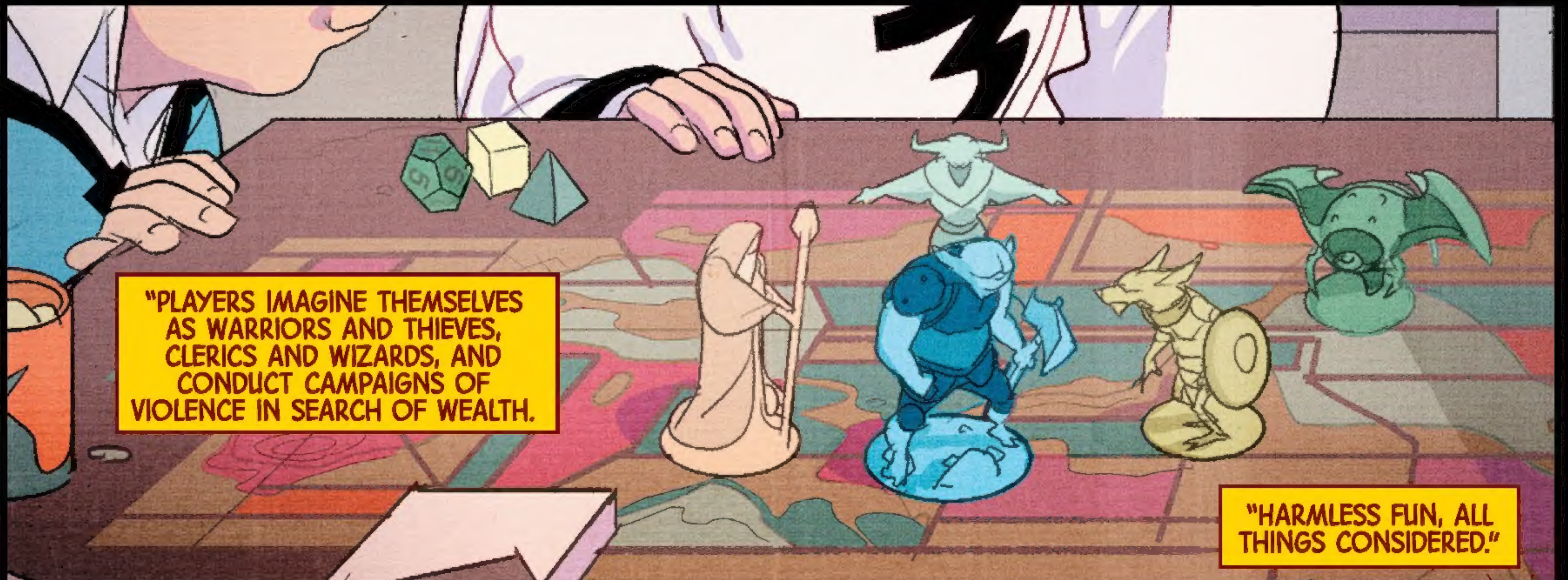
YOU SAY
THAT AS IF YOU
EXPECT ME TO
KNOW WHAT YOU
ARE **TALKING**
ABOUT.

→SIGH←

IT IS A
GAME.



"A FANTASY
ROLE-PLAYING
GAME."



"PLAYERS IMAGINE THEMSELVES
AS WARRIORS AND THIEVES,
CLERICS AND WIZARDS, AND
CONDUCT CAMPAIGNS OF
VIOLENCE IN SEARCH OF WEALTH."

"HARMLESS FUN, ALL
THINGS CONSIDERED."



THERE WAS A BIT OF A
MORAL PANIC IN THE
1980s SURROUNDING
THESE GAMES,
HOWEVER.

THERE WAS
TALK ABOUT HOW
THEY WERE DEMONIC.
HOW THEY MESSED
ABOUT WITH REAL
MAGIC.



"ALL NONSENSE,
OF COURSE..."



"...EXCEPT
FOR ONE."

"COBOLORUM."



REAL MAGIC?
BUT WHO WOULD
DARE?

WHO INDEED?
A MYSTERY TO
THIS DAY, AND I
HAVE TRIED TO
FIND OUT.

POWERFUL
RITES ARE INSCRIBED
IN THE RULEBOOK,
ENCODED IN THE
ILLUSTRATIONS, CIPHERED
INTO RANDOMIZED
TABLES.

A GAMING
GROUP UNWITTINGLY
BECOME A COVEN.
A CIRCUIT.



UNTIL THE
IMAGINARY
ADVENTURE IS NO
LONGER **IMAGINARY**
BUT A FESTERING SORE
IN REALITY ITSELF, AS
WE SEE BEFORE
US.

UNTIL **OUR**
WORLD AND
THE WORLD OF
COBOLORUM
INTERSECT.



THEN LET US **LANCE** THIS
ONTOLOGICAL BOIL,
MY LOVE.



WOULD
THAT WE COULD,
DARLING.

BUT THIS IS
NOT THE **FIRST**
TIME I HAVE BATTLED
COBOLORUM, AND
I KNOW THIS--



--THE
RULES MUST BE
FOLLOWED.

"WHICH MEANS I
MUST ASSEMBLE
A PARTY."

**THE THIEF:
FELICIA HARDY,
A.K.A. THE BLACK CAT.**

AAAAAAND...

...THERE.

HEL-LO,
BEAUTIFUL--

AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!

HELLO,
MS. HARDY--

OH,
I SEE THAT
YOU'RE...
OTHERWISE
ENGAGED.

AAAAAAH,
HATE YOU,
DOC!!!



GOTCHA!



OKAY.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, STRANGE?

I REQUIRE A **THIEF**, MS. HARDY.

AND AS YOU HAVE STOLEN FROM MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM **TWICE** IN RECENT MEMORY AND HAVE YET TO FIND YOURSELF EXILED TO THE DARK DIMENSION...

...ONE COULD ARGUE THAT YOU OWE ME.



PSSH.

YOU GOT **NOTHING** ON ME. YOU'LL NEVER TAKE ME **ALIVE**, COPPER.



OH?

DO YOU THINK **SPIDER-MAN** EVER WONDERS **WHO** IT WAS WHO ALMOST EXILED MANHATTAN TO THE VAULTS OF THE **GILDED SAINT**?*



YOU KNOW WHAT, STRANGE? WHEN YOU'RE **RIGHT**, YOU'RE **RIGHT**.

*BLACK CAT (2020) #5! --DS

THE PRIEST:

AGAIN, MY
CONDOLENCES
ON YOUR LOSS,
DOCTOR...*

*SEE MOON KNIGHT #30 TO SEE
WHAT'S BECOME OF MARC SPECTOR! --DS

DR. YEHYA BADR.
A.K.A. HUNTER'S MOON.

...BUT I REQUIRE
A **PRIEST**, AND WITH
BOTH **MOON KNIGHT**
AND **DAREDEVIL**
UNAVAILABLE, I FEAR I
MUST IMPOSE.



IT IS NO IMPOSITION, DOCTOR STRANGE.

MY BROTHER, MARC SPECTOR, OWED YOU A DEBT, DID HE NOT?



ERR...

GIVEN THE SITUATION, I COULDN'T POSSIBLY--



LIFE AND DEATH ARE ABSTRACT CONCEPTS TO A FIST OF KHONSHU, DOCTOR.

BUT DEBT IS NOT.

YOU WILL HAVE YOUR PRIEST, DOCTOR STRANGE.

A man with a white forehead patch, wearing a green suit, is shown from the waist up, surrounded by a glowing green energy field. He is looking towards the left.

WELL?

DO WE
HAVE AN **ACCORD**,
MR. MASTERS?

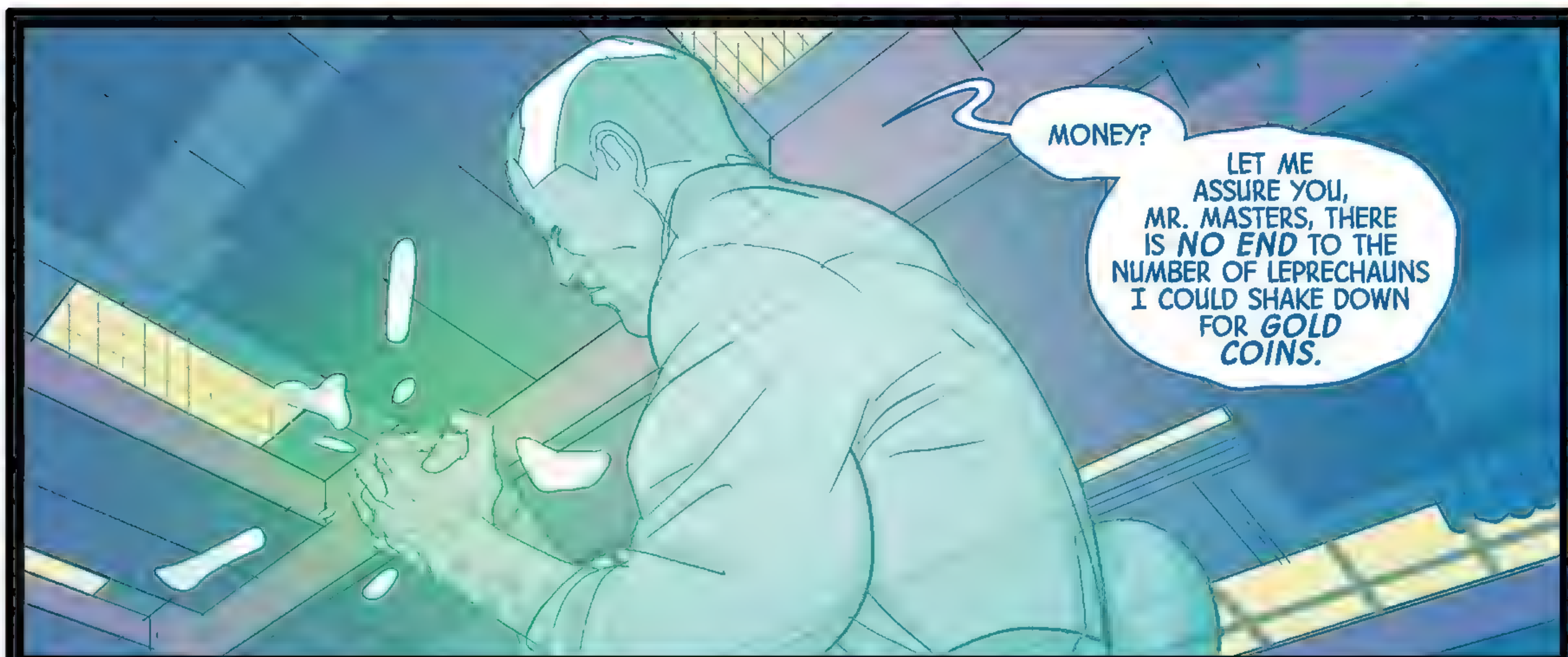
THE FIGHTER:
TONY MASTERS.
A.K.A. TASKMASTER.
A.K.A. "THAT BASTARD," ETC.

"DO WE HAVE
AN **ACCORD**?"
HAW!

DO YOU
GUYS EVER **LISTEN**
TO YOURSELVES?

YOU **KNOW**
WHAT I WANT TO
HEAR, DOC--

--WHAT'S
IN IT FOR
MRS. MASTERS'
LITTLE BOY?



MONEY?

LET ME ASSURE YOU, MR. MASTERS, THERE IS **NO END** TO THE NUMBER OF LEPRECHAUNS I COULD SHAKE DOWN FOR **GOLD COINS**.



THEN I AM **IN**, DOC.

JUST LIKE THAT?

I MEAN, SURE. ASIDE FROM YOUR PROMISE OF EXTORTING TINY IRISHMEN ON MY BEHALF, WORKING FOR **QUOTE-UNQUOTE** HEROES IS A **GAS**.

CRIMINAL MASTERMINDS WOULD CHUCK A GUY LIKE ME TO THE WOLVES AND SLEEP CLEAN.

BUT A GUY LIKE **YOU**? FORGET IT, YOU'RE GOING TO GET ME OUT ALIVE FOR SURE!

OTHERWISE, IT'LL BE ALL, "THAT POOR **DEVIL**! HE DIDN'T DESERVE **THIS!**"

HAHAHA!

LET'S **DO THIS!**

HRRNN.





WELL.

SO YOU
HAVE ASSEMBLED
YOUR **LITTLE
FRIENDS**--

AN ODD
ENOUGH GROUP
OF **SECRET
DEFENDERS**, BUT
NEEDS MUST.

COBOLORUM
HAS **RULES**,
CLEA.

THE REALM MUST
BE ENTERED BY AN
**ADVENTURING
PARTY**.

MAGIC USER,
FIGHTER, THIEF,
PRIEST.

AND HOW
EXACTLY DO YOU
KNOW THIS OTHER
WOMAN WITH **WHITE
HAIR**, STEPHEN?

CLEA,
I ASSURE
YOU--

YO!

STRANGE!
GET ON THE
GOOD FOOT, I
WANT TO BE BACK
FOR **HAPPY
HOUR!**

I WOULD
LIKE NOTHING
MORE THAN TO
WAGE WAR UPON
IT WITH YOU AT
MY SIDE. BUT
THE **RULES ARE
CLEAR.**

AH. NEVER
MIND. SHE'S
HORRIBLE.

INDEED.

I WILL
RETURN SOON,
MY LOVE.

YOU HAD
BETTER. BECAUSE
IF I HAVE TO ASSEMBLE A
"PARTY" TO COME **AFTER**
YOU, I WILL BE **EVER**
SO CROSS.

COME ALONG,
HEROES.

THE TIME
HAS COME FOR
US TO **PLAY**.



THE GHASTWOODS.

YOU DIDN'T
TELL ME THIS WAS
GOING TO COME
WITH A COSTUME
CHANGE.

THIS WORLD
CHANGES US
TO BETTER
SUIT IT.

MY
FRIENDS--AND MR.
MASTERS--

HAW!

--ARE ANY OF YOU FAMILIAR
WITH FANTASY ROLE-
PLAYING GAMES?

DO I
LOOK LIKE
A NERD?

YEAH,
I DATED IN
HIGH SCHOOL,
DOC.

DID YOU
REALLY?

I MEAN,
I GOT MEMORY
PROBLEMS, BUT
PROBABLY.

I AM
NO STRANGER
TO LIMINAL
SPACES,
DOCTOR.

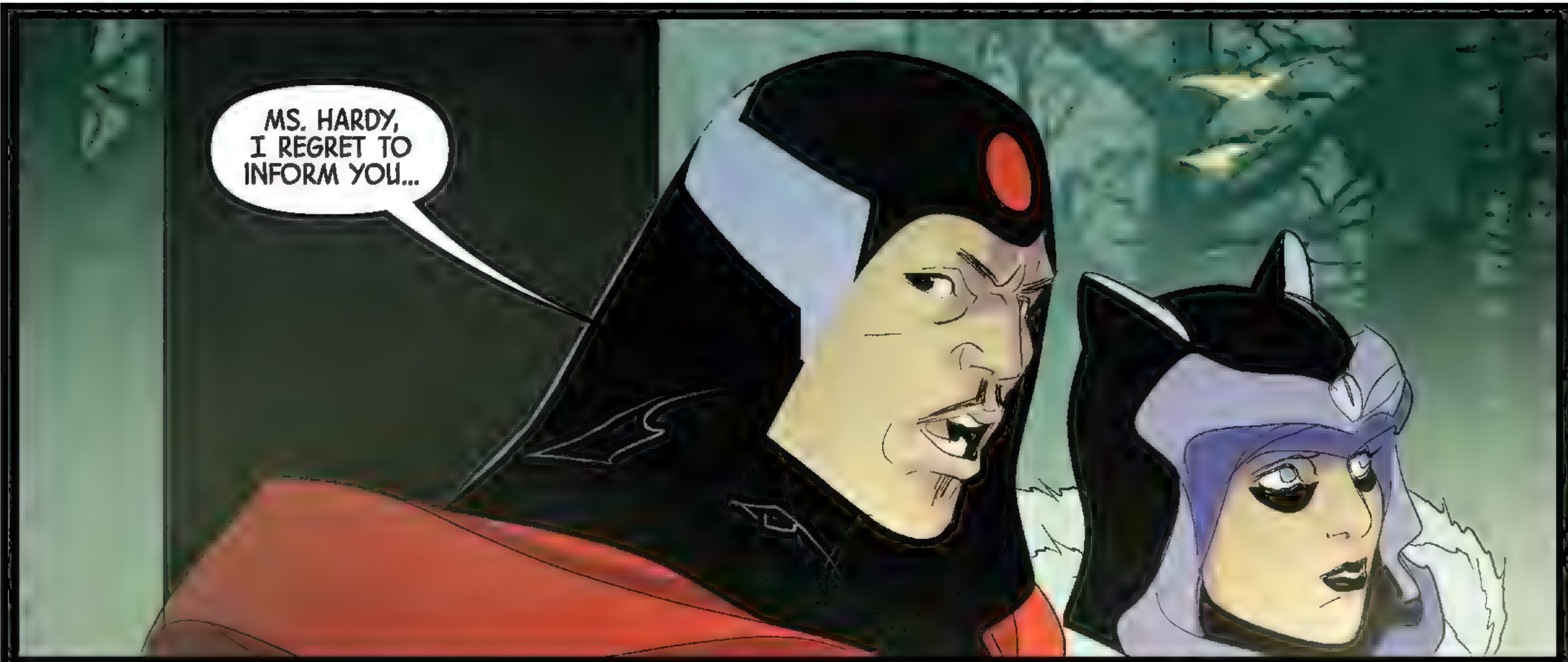
WELL, I'M GLAD YOU
GUYS ARE ALL HAVING
A GOOD TIME.

SINCE
SOMEBODY
HAS TO BRING UP
THE CLICHE--

THE FISTS OF
KHONSHU HAVE
ALWAYS WALKED
IN TWO
WORLDS.

ADDING A
THIRD DOES
NOT VEX ME.

--IF YOU
DIE IN THE
GAME, DO YOU
DIE IN REAL
LIFE?



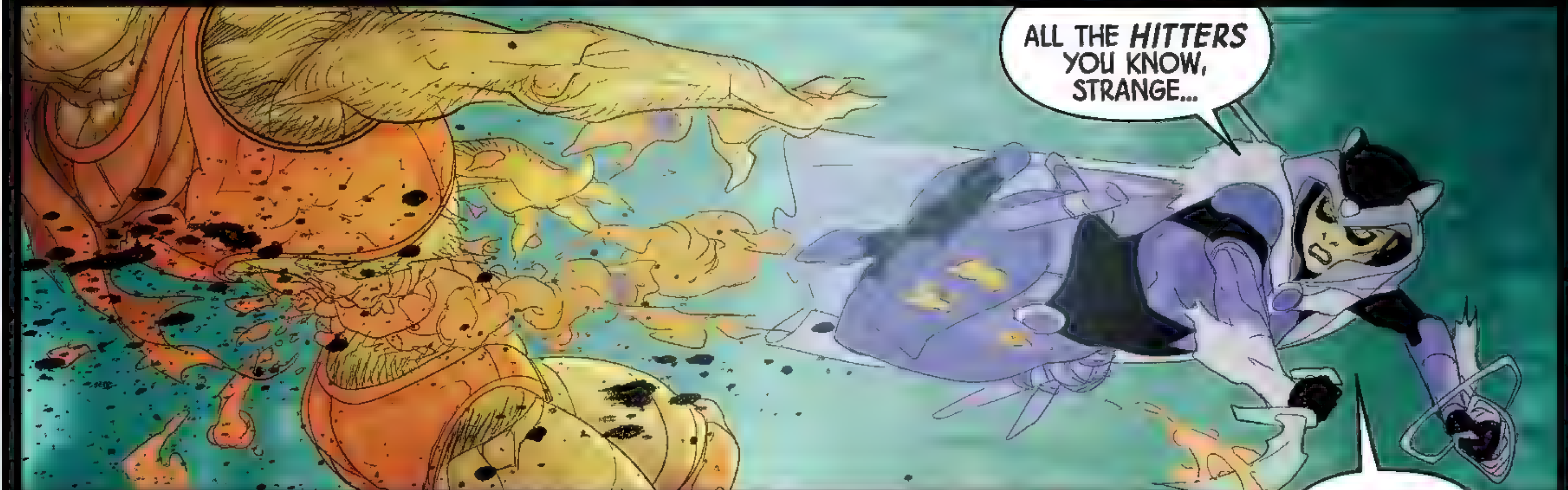
MS. HARDY,
I REGRET TO
INFORM YOU...



...THIS
GAME IS
REAL LIFE!



OH, HELL YEAH! IT'S
SWORD-AND-
BOARD TIME,
BABY!



ALL THE *HITTERS*
YOU KNOW,
STRANGE...



...AND YOU
HAD TO GO
WITH *HIM*?

SPLAT! POW!
HAHAHA!



WELL,

HISTORICALLY,
THE PURPOSE OF THE
FIGHTER HAS BEEN
THAT OF A "MEAT
SHIELD."

GIVEN THE
HIGH LEVEL OF
RISK INHERENT IN
SUCH A ROLE...



...IT IS BEST TO
RECRUIT SOMEONE
YOU WOULD NOT
MIND *LOSING*.

HAHAHAHA!



ALL TOLD,
DOCTOR...



...THESE
MONSTERS
ARE SOMEWHAT
PALTRY.



OF
COURSE.

THIS IS MERELY
THE **OPENING**
ENCOUNTER.

THE FORCES
ARRAYED AGAINST
US WILL **INCREASE**
IN LETHALITY AS
COBOLORUM TAKES
OUR MEASURE.



OKAY. SO I'M THE THIEF,
AND THAT COMES DOWN TO
WANT, WHETHER IN HERE
OR REAL LIFE--

THE
GAME **IS** REAL
LIFE--

YES,
STRANGE,
YOU DID TELL
ME THAT.

SO WHAT
DOES THE GAME
WANT?



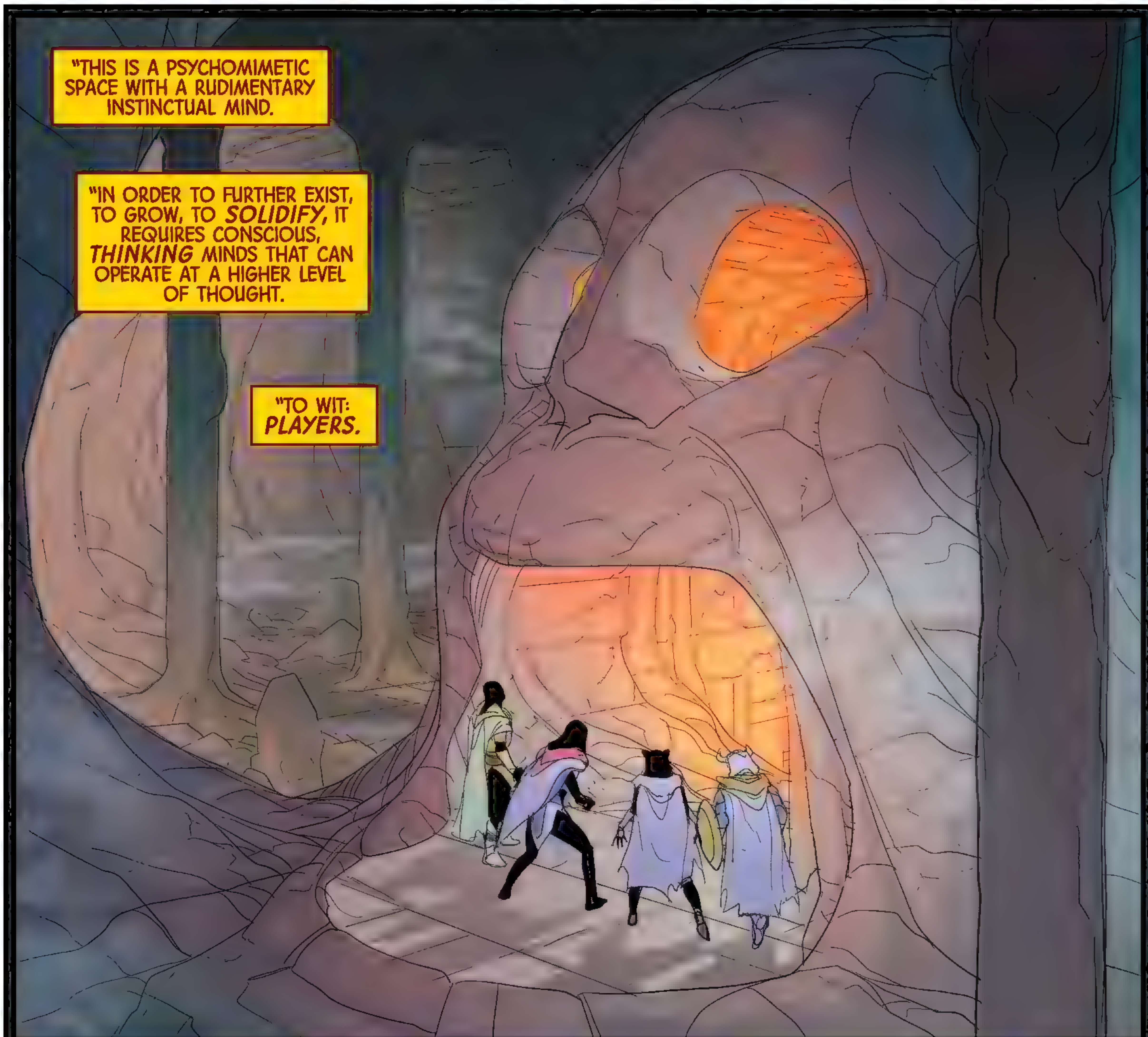
WHAT DO
ANY OF US
WANT?

TO
EXIST.

"THIS IS A PSYCHOMIMETIC SPACE WITH A RUDIMENTARY INSTINCTUAL MIND.

"IN ORDER TO FURTHER EXIST, TO GROW, TO **SOLIDIFY**, IT REQUIRES CONSCIOUS, **THINKING** MINDS THAT CAN OPERATE AT A HIGHER LEVEL OF THOUGHT.

"TO WIT: **PLAYERS.**

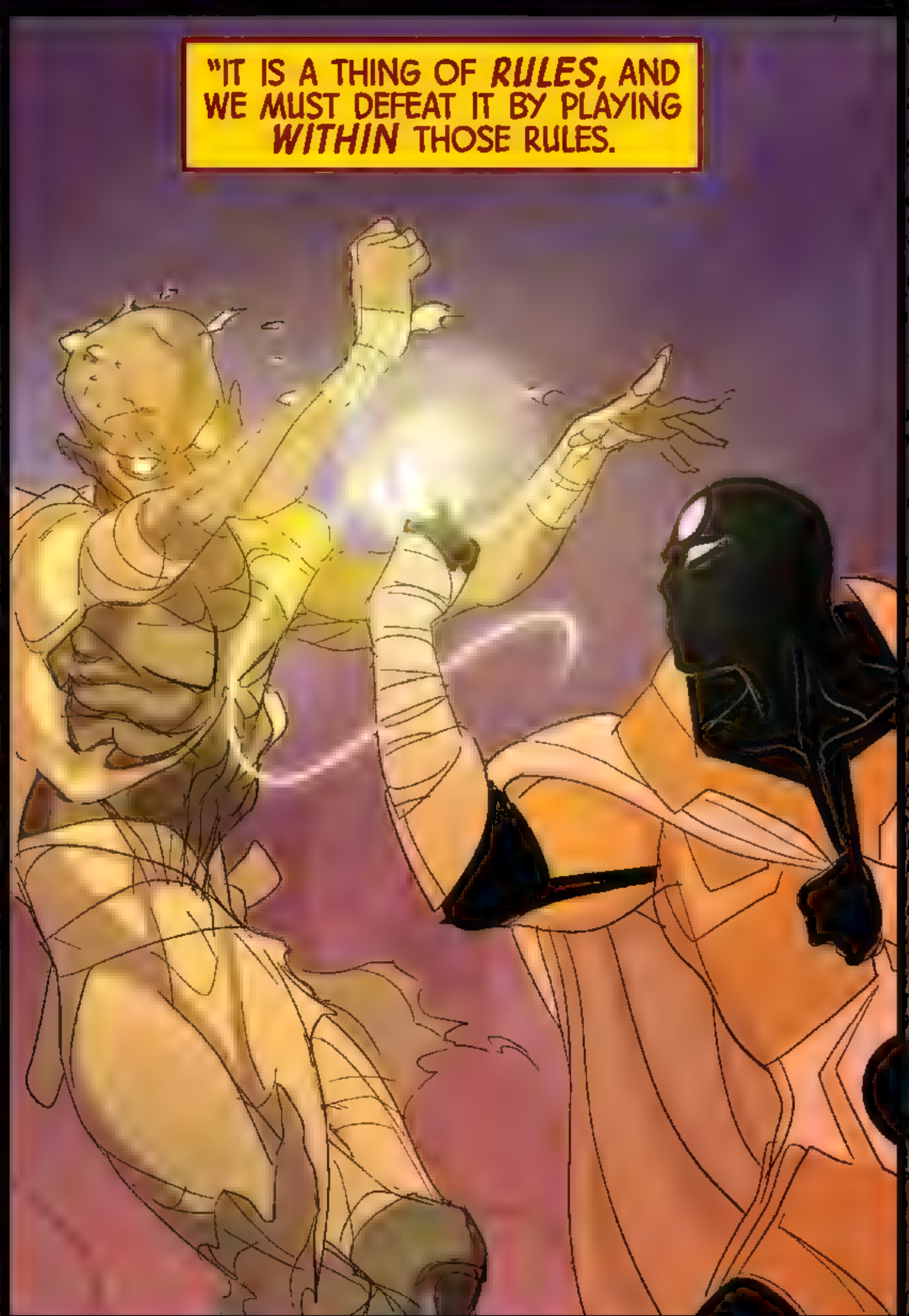


"IN PLAYING THE GAME, THEY HAVE OPENED THE DOOR, CREATING A CLOSED CIRCUIT OF ARCAN E POWER. ONE THAT THEY ARE NOW **BOUND** TO.



"WE MUST TAKE THEM **OUT** OF COBOLORUM, HOWEVER MUCH IT MIGHT FIGHT US IN THE PROCESS.

"IT IS A THING OF **RULES**, AND WE MUST DEFEAT IT BY PLAYING **WITHIN** THOSE RULES.



"IF WE CAN FIND A MEANS OF
BANISHING IT **PERMANENTLY** IN
THE PROCESS, SO MUCH THE BETTER..."

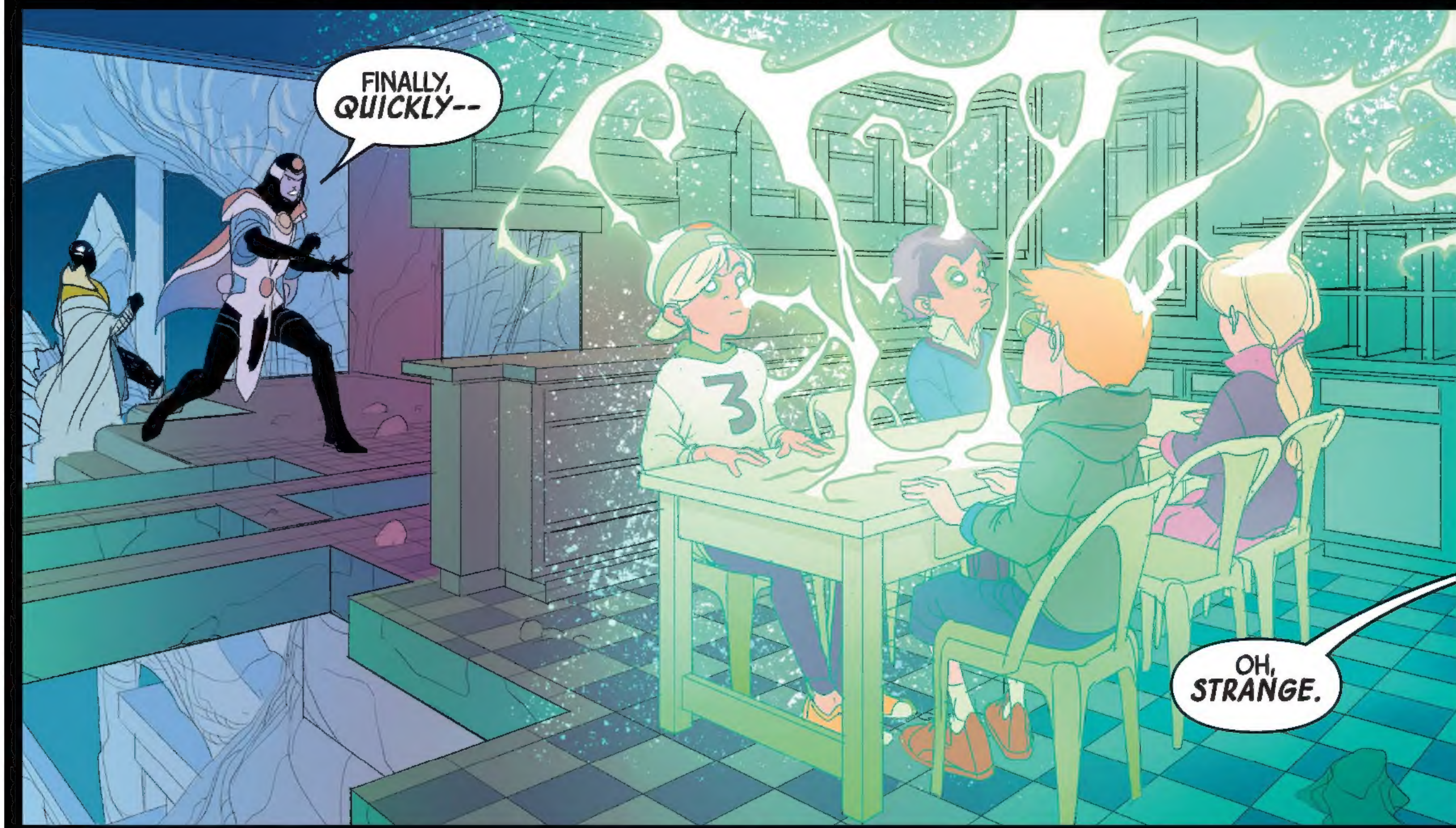


"...BUT OUR
PRIORITY REMAINS
THE **PLAYERS**."



"FOUR OR FIVE
INNOCENTS, IN **WELL**
OVER THEIR HEADS."









NOW,
LET US
SEE...

AFTER
ALL, WHAT IS A
DUNGEON...



...WITHOUT A
DRAGON?



UHH...

...I DON'T
THINK THIS
GAME IS FUN
ANYMORE.

TO BE CONTINUED!

NEXT:

DOCTOR STRANGE #14



GAME OVER!

A living role-playing game has taken root in Manhattan, transforming parts of the city into a dark fantasy world. Doctor Strange and his Secret Defenders have managed to insert themselves into the narrative, but they're not alone... Can Strange and company learn the rules and save those trapped within, or is it back to the Dark Ages for the Big Apple?

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